

## Testimony for the Transportation Committee March 4, 2013

### The Asian Pacific American Affairs Commission Supports Senate Bill 628

My name is Kyle Barrette. I am a social worker residing in Hartford and an intern with the Asian Pacific American Affairs Commission. I come here to testify on behalf of the commission in support of Senate bill 628 concerning the issuance of driver's licenses to certain immigrants. The commission offers its wholehearted support for this bill with a keen understanding of the challenging process of migration, resettlement and integration for all immigrants. The question I come here to ask today is why must we knowingly replicate the dangerous challenges faced by our immigrant descendants for those who come to this country now?

Granting undocumented immigrants driver's licenses can help enfranchise one of the most exploited minorities in America. The lack of identification such as a driver's license leaves undocumented immigrants ripe for exploitation with absolutely no recourse.

The inability to obtain a driver's license is dangerous. While this may be difficult for citizens to imagine, the dangers associated with not having a driver's license or identification are painfully apparent for undocumented immigrants who are unable to open a bank account or obtain driver education. In light of this I ask that we citizens try for a moment to imagine ourselves in the shoes of those without legal status, without a driver's license and subsequently without the safety of a bank account. Imagine walking home late in the evening from your place of employment. Inside your pocket is your pay from the last two weeks of work. It may not be much but those green pieces of paper represent your ability to survive until the next payday comes. Imagine yourself walking home through dimly lit streets with this survival money in your pocket knowing that everyone you pass by is aware of your plight, that you do not have legal status or a bank account and that you are forced to carry your money with you. Imagine slowly inching your way down the road knowing that if anyone so chooses to brutalize you and wrest that survival money from your pocket that you have no police protection or support to turn to because calling on local authorities would risk revealing your undocumented status. How vulnerable do you feel? I know the terror I would feel and I know how the undocumented individuals in my community feel; terrified, helpless, defenseless, exposed, fearful, and insignificant.

This bill is not just about the ability to drive a car legally or obtain insurance, although such benefits will indeed make our roads safer for everyone including our children. This bill is about the benefits and protections that go along with identification that we so often forget and take for granted as citizens of this country.

The inability to obtain a bank account is but one of many examples of how the lack of a driver's license poses actual threats to human beings. Looking at this bill simply as the issuance of a driver's license to undocumented immigrants focuses the debate on civil rights. However, it is clear considering the

aforementioned example that what this bill addresses is not civil rights but human rights; the right to be free from violence, and the human right to security. Although the harmful label "illegal alien" has allowed some Americans to forget, undocumented immigrants are indeed human beings who carry the same inalienable human rights as the rest of us and who deserve our compassion and support. Those who we are talking about today are not criminals looking to take advantage of our meager welfare system, these are human beings who often risk their lives to come here and offer themselves as exploited labor so that they may eke out an existence for themselves and their family. This bill is not about offering a free path to citizenship or entitlement to social benefits, this bill is about affording human rights to people that carry the same love in their heart, the same passion for life and the same drive to better themselves as American citizens.

To vote against this bill and block undocumented immigrants from obtaining identification is to knowingly place them in harm's way. Voting against this bill will do nothing to stop the flow of illegal immigration into this country and will do everything to increase victimization of the undocumented community.

Providing driver's licenses to undocumented immigrants would support viewpoints on both sides of the immigration debate. The ability to obtain driver's licenses would allow for the involvement and integration of undocumented immigrants within the local community and local economy in ways that would improve public safety and economic development. Just to give one example, the ability of immigrants to obtain a bank account would support local investment of their money and their attempts to gain citizenship through legal channels.

It is straightforward; Senate Bill 628 will afford human rights to the most vulnerable population in our society and improves our communities in Connecticut.

On behalf of the Asian Pacific American Affairs Commission I again offer my support of Senate Bill 628 and ask that you look into your heart and do the same.